

AFPA Chair intro for Shadow Minister Joel Fitzgibbon

AFPA Members dinner

Canberra

8 November, 2017

Good evening everyone.

Thank you AFPA members and all our special guests for joining us tonight.

I am very pleased to be welcoming a good friend of our industries, the Shadow Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the Honourable Joel Fitzgibbon (who reassures me he has thoroughly checked his parents' and grandparents' birth certificates!).

Perhaps more importantly for all of us is Joel's other title - Co-convenor of the Federal Parliament's Friends of Forestry and Forest Industries group. Liberal Tony Pasin from Barker is the other convenor. Joel we really appreciated it when you immediately agreed to add this role to your many Parliamentary duties several years ago when AFPA asked you. That group is our starting point for

anything we do in Parliament House and we know that it was your enthusiasm and support for our Gala Dinner in September for example which helped ensure we had some 45 members of Parliament in the room.

Thank you once again.

One MP in the room for that dinner of course was the Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull.

We were delighted right across the industry when the Prime Minister announced that Assistant Minister Anne Ruston would immediately commence work on a new National Forest Industries Plan/ I'm pleased to report that the Minister and her departmental team are already working with AFPA on developing the plan.

The PM noted that the last time a Federal Government delivered a view on our industries was 1992 in the national forestry statement.

This was a Paul Keating document.

There was also the 1997 Vision 2020 document as you will recall, which called out a target of 3 million hectares of plantations by 2020.

(We are at about 2 million hectares by the way and here's a tip...we aren't going to plant another 1 million in three years...I will come back to this later!)

This new industry plan will build on the good work of the Forest Industries Advisory Council – or FIAC - which produced **this document** offering a range of recommendations. Some of those are for industry – and we are working on many. But there are also plenty of areas where only Government can help.

Joel, your response at the dinner and later via media release was one any sensible, thoughtful Shadow Minister would make on the volley as it were. You said basically; Labor supports this industry and better planning as a matter of record – but let's see exactly what the Government proposes.

Well I can't tell you of course what the Government will put before us mid next year but I can tell you what we are asking for...and what we would very much like, your Party's public support for as soon as you feel you can.

On energy policy, Labor has – rightly – adopted a pragmatic approach of seeking a bipartisan policy that will withstand changes of government and provide much-needed stability and certainty. This is a welcome approach for energy-intensive industries such as ours.

Joel, our industry is performing strongly, but it's full potential is yet to be realised. As we head toward another federal election, we urge the major parties to show bipartisanship on forestry policy to provide the long-term certainty we need to drive investment and innovation.

The latest ABARES quarterly data has just come out. Our Sales and service income for the forestry sector increased 7 % to 23.7 billion!

When I open to [page 125](#) I note that the value of forest products exports is \$3.3 billion...on the next page I note the value of forest product imports is \$5.3 billion.

To put it simply we are a good news story but, we are still importing more and more timber to meet demand that can't be met locally because we don't have enough resource. There is a construction boom in our region and Australia's forest industries are missing out.

Joel, we have a terrific industry supporting about 120,000 high paying regional jobs – across the full value chain. As a local member for a regional electorate, I know that you recognise just how vital well-paying skilled jobs are in regional communities. Australia is the seventh most forested nation on earth. We have all the elements to be a much larger industry but we need some help in several crucial areas to truly unlock our potential.

I know AFPA is briefing you in greater detail on our asks of Government but I will just touch on two major items:

New Trees. I mentioned the Vision 2020 target of 3 million hectares. In fact, large-scale, new tree planting in this country came to a shuddering halt about a decade ago. A complete stop. We simply cannot grow as an industry if we don't get more trees in the ground.

Here's our ask of the Government and Opposition.

We need a national target of an additional 400,000 hectares planted in the right places over the next ten years. And we want up to a quarter of that to be modest plantings done by farmers which

improve their principal agricultural operation (it's called agro-forestry). AFPA is engaging deeply with the National Farmers Federation on this. By the way I am sure you noticed that the New Zealand Labor Government has a plan to plant an additional 1 billion trees so we have kept the bar quite achievable for you!

Native forestry operations are the second big resource area for our industries.

We have in this country 125 million hectares of native forest. After decades of state and federal Governments actions we have been reduced to just 5.5 million hectares of multiple-use forest which we can use to sustainably produce the fine timbers we love for our floors and staircases and so on. We harvest about half a percent a year of that - and by law we regenerate the area we harvest.

The Regional Forest Agreements have not been brilliant for us, to be honest. When Paul Keating signed <sup>1</sup>the National Forest Statement in 1992 he noted that the intent of the RFAs were to maintain

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<sup>1</sup> <https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-9547>

employment in the industry by shifting logging activities to coups of low conservation value. RFAs were supposed to be the line in the sand which would sustain our industry. Since then, three million hectares were taken out of production and moved into National Parks. Having said that, without RFAs those seeking to close our industry down would succeed very quickly via relentless legal challenges under the EPBC Act.

Joel, we also have ideas for the Government and Opposition for new measures to support the growth of the bio-economy. We need the crazy exclusion on renewable energy credits for industrial heat changed, we need to grow our hardwood and softwood processing sectors, and we need research breakthroughs via expansion of the initial funding the National Institute for Forest Products Innovation as well as the lifting of the voluntary funding cap for R&D via FWPA... but in the interests of time I will leave those matters for later briefings.

Ladies and gentlemen please join me in welcoming the Shadow  
Minister for Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry, Joel Fitzgibbon.